

# Assessment *in* Practice

## On the “Write” Path to Student Learning: Library and Writing Center Collaboration

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The support provided by research librarians and writing center tutors is often conducted in parallel but separate sequences. Librarians help users locate information at the beginning of a writing cycle while writing center tutors help organize their thoughts and synthesize information into a document. By deliberately placing the research and writing services into one location and developing a shared vision, this collaborative approach can provide enormous benefits not only to writers and researchers, but also to the staff in both areas. This case study outlines considerations needed for libraries and writing centers to collaborate effectively and describes benefits derived from this arrangement.

The genesis for this particular collaboration came from student assessment data, which revealed a demand for library study space. At the same time, there was a desire for increased visibility for both the research and writing services. The library’s research team had an ideal location on the first floor, but was experiencing a gradual decline in research consultations. The writing center, on the other hand, had a less optimal location on the library’s second floor, but was coping with a growing demand for services. Through existing assessment data practices, we were able to document the need and opportunity for collaboration.

The library invitation to relocate the writing center included an offer to analyze writing center transaction data to better understand their work with student writers. As with the assessment data analyses, the results revealed intersecting services that could be provided by both the library and writing center in one location, thus freeing up second floor space formerly occupied by the writing center.

Through careful analysis and planning, then, the Knowledge Hub was created in the summer of 2014. The

area, which integrates research and writing services, occupies prime real estate on the library first floor. The Knowledge Hub is staffed by undergraduate writing tutors and professional librarian staff. When writing and research consultations end for the day, the space reverts to open study tables.

Collaboration involves many elements, some arrived at by trial and error and others through learning processes. Below are some items to consider:

**Know Thy Neighbor:** Data collection practices were not the only factors laying the groundwork for this collaboration, as the library and writing center already had a history of working together, most notably in teaching academic integrity and citation skills. Both units shared a general appreciation for one another's role in providing student support.

**Culture:** The road to collaboration was not without challenges. Bringing two different units together requires patience and understanding. Although the library and writing center provide support for the writing process, the help is provided at different stages and raised questions about how effectively integration could be achieved. We wrestled with concerns about identity and independence, as well as mixing undergraduate tutors with professional librarians. In the end, we worked carefully to respect differences and highlight the areas of overlap, while remaining focused on our shared goal of student success.

**Communication:** In order to effectively plan for and manage a shared space, communication is essential. Both units met regularly before the renovation to discuss the processes and procedures required for the integration. We utilize multiple channels for distributing information, including a new discussion list, attending each other's unit meetings, and scheduling periodic meetings for the library and writing center administrative team.

**Documentation:** A memorandum of understanding is vital for shared collaborative spaces. Articulating what two or more departments do together develops a shared direction and creates a historical narrative for future faculty and staff. Other useful documents can include joint mission statements, operations manuals, and assessment plans.

**Training:** In this case study, both units agreed that student training was critical to the success of the new combined service. As a result, greater emphasis was placed on effective training, including a new online tutorial, job competency descriptions, crosstraining simulations, and multiple workshops with student writing tutors.

The benefits of this collaboration to students are obvious: they have a one-stop service for help with researching and writing, whether brainstorming ideas, locating information, discussing paper organization, or citing sources. A related benefit is that the library was then able to respond to student demand for additional study space. Because this integrated service is in an open, highly visible space, both the writing and research services have seen growth in the

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number of consultations provided. Since we work so closely together, both staffs have acquired a deeper understanding of each other's work, which has informed our own work and practices.

This case study illustrates a highly integrated approach to library-writing center collaboration, which is only one of many ways such units can work together. Both libraries and writing centers have written extensively on collaboration opportunities, including Elmborg and Hook's *Centers for learning; Writing centers and libraries in collaboration* (2005), which not only includes a variety of case studies but also provides a theoretical approach for how and why such collaborations are valuable.

We invite you to consider what opportunities exist on your campus where cross-unit collaboration might flourish in a shared work environment. For more information about our library-writing center collaboration, please visit: <http://libguides.udayton.edu/IUPUI>.

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- The National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) was established in December 2008, and is co-located at the University of Illinois and Indiana University.
- The NILOA website contains free assessment resources and can be found at <http://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org>.
- The NILOA research team has scanned institutional websites, surveyed chief academic officers, and commissioned a series of occasional papers.

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